

> CUSTOMER SERVICE

best practice

The International Customer Service Professionals (ICSP) and GAPbuster Worldwide, have conducted research into what makes good customer service. Here, **Tricia Olsen**, CEO and founder of ICSP, talks us through the results, which were announced nationwide in April.

Does your customer RULE?

Have you noticed just how much more demanding customers are today, adding to our every day pressures and expecting more and more? The bar seems to keep lifting; it just gets higher and higher.

This has become very evident by our customers' behaviours, as they are expecting service to be faster, more accurate and more efficient. They have less tolerance for mistakes and are much less forgiving.

Today's customer is far more educated with the attitude of "I'm the customer and it's my right." Surely you have experienced this response? We have made it our job to take a good look at what our customers really want from us.

International Customer Service Professionals (ICSP), Australia and New Zealand's professional body in customer service, and GAPbuster Worldwide, an International Service Experience Agency, are now in their third year of research, and are finding out what is really changing in the service space.

Firstly, let's be very clear that research has shown us that customer expectations have almost doubled in the past two years, so if we deliver the same sort of customer service today as what we did two years ago we will be out of date and potentially out of business.

The main driver for such rapid change is information technology. We are now able to access information at a much faster rate and consequently expectations have arisen around the speed of response.

THE TOP FIVE MOST VALUED FACTORS FOR A GREAT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE?

- **Friendliness...** wins hands down every time. However it must be genuine friendliness, not pretence and not robotic in the style of "have a nice day". Customers want us to be sincere, and mean what we say.
- **Knowledge...** is absolutely vital. This skill is not negotiable in successful businesses today, it is a must have. Customers have far more confidence in the product when a staff member knows what they are talking about. Staff are more confident with selling when they know all about the product. It can be a real win - win.
- **Efficiency...** is especially important as our customers are becoming very time poor. They are asking for prompt, courteous and efficient service and are ultimately saying "don't waste my precious time!"
- **Professionalism...** is the overall presence that we portray to the customer. The way we dress, speak, act - what image do we portray? Just remember every person who speaks to a customer or just walks by is creating the brand promise of our business.
- **Responsiveness...** is becoming more important especially as customer expectations rise. Customers are looking for short cuts and an easier and more efficient way to do business. Another fascinating aspect of the research was value for money. Customers are prepared to pay more to get what they want as long as it not ridiculously overpriced.

> JOHNNY'S GUEST

As conveners of International Customer Service Week, ICSP runs a My Customer Rules Award scheme which recognises three categories: outstanding single service - real moments of truth where customers were blown away with the brilliance of service; consistently excellent service - where there was a business that was extremely consistently brilliant in their service delivery; and the most voted award.

"I recently visited my local Coles supermarket, just as I have for the past 20 years, but this time I experienced something different. Pushing my trolley down an aisle, I stopped near a young man checking the shelves. He glanced over and asked "How is your shopping going today?" A little surprised I responded with "Good, thank you." He then said "It's a great time to shop early in the morning, not a lot of people around. In fact, next week is even better as we have these amazing specials on." As I turned to respond he said "No I mean it. I have seen the catalogue and there are some real bargains, it will be fantastic."

I could not help noticing his genuine friendliness, positive attitude and pride in servicing his customers. Realising I was regular shopper he reached into his pocket and gave me a special Coles trolley token for my ongoing visits.

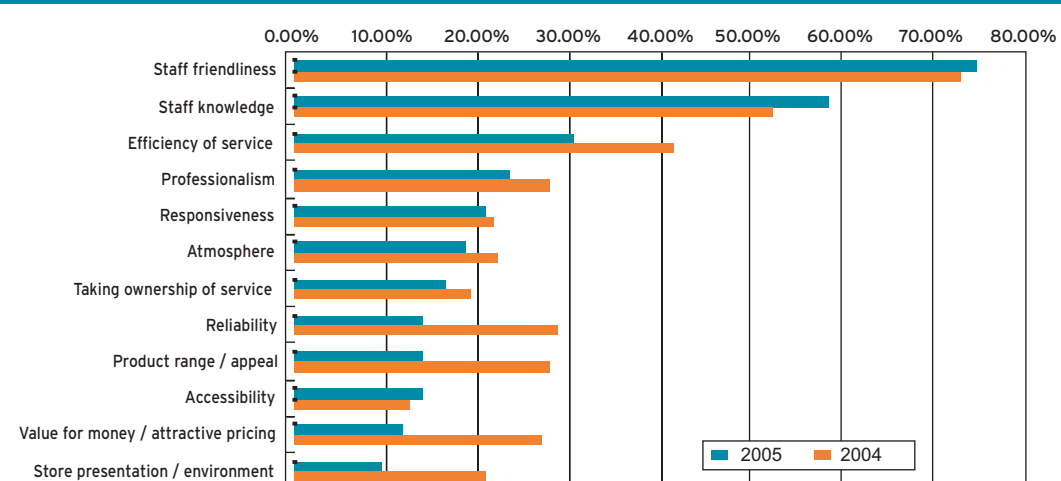
His whole philosophy was "Our customers are so important to us, I believe they are guests visiting our home." Here is a young man working in the business of service, giving his customers a memorable experience, showing that he cares and is excited about the products. But even more importantly, encouraging his customers to come back. Excellent customer service can affect the bottom line. And Johnny had no idea who I was.

Johnny has since been nominated for the "My Customer Rules" customer service 2006 Award. Congratulations Johnny, store manager, Coles supermarket, Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn!

If you know of a customer service champion like Johnny please nominate them online now at www.mycustomerrules.com. Nominations close 30 June. It's that easy!"

TRICIA OLSEN, ICSP

MY CUSTOMER RULES RESEARCH COMPARISON 2005 WITH 2004



You will notice though that value for money / attractive pricing has slipped from seventh to eleventh place over a period of 12 months, and customer service staff responsiveness has risen from ninth to fifth.

International Customer Service Professionals (ICSP) is a professional body with the mission to be the 'Infinite Resource Centre for Service Professionals'. This is facilitated through a membership base that offers resources and education to enhance and improve Australia's service businesses. For more details on ICSP visit www.icsp.com.au